

FREE PLANET

**SITTERSON
KYRIAZIS
ASTONE
ESPOSITO**

**EXPANSION
PROTOCOLS
PART 1 OF 2**



Humanity has fulfilled its destiny, spreading out across the stars, but the human diaspora has long since grown estranged.

Landing upon alien, uncharted worlds, humanity rediscovered itself, forging new social structures, governments, and ways of working and living together. But from the ashes of the civilization-ending Cataclysm, a new hegemony arose: the Interplanetary Development Alliance, intent upon bringing its long-lost cousins back into the fold.

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NET

By the time of the Lutheran Revolution, Thouros was a valued member of the Interplanetary Development Alliance, its mining and metallurgical industries essential to the Alliance's universal expansion.

MY SON.
MAY OUR
ANCESTORS
GUIDE YOUR
AIM.

MAY OUR
DESCENDANTS
SING YOUR
PRAISES.

Thouros had become as peaceful and stable as any other member planet, a dramatic deviation from millennia of hostilities between two broad civilizations, distinct members of the Human Diaspora: The Urlonians and the Hrind.

Over generations of inducements and displays of power soft and hard, the Alliance's irenic influence took hold.

MAY MY
VICTORY GRANT US
IMMORTALITY.

Though catastrophe was avoided, the echoes of Thouros' truculence persisted in its reputation for the provision of superior Alliance military personnel.

RISE!

YOU ARE OF
MY EARTH AND I
BEQUEATH IT TO
YOU, YOURS TO
GUARD, PROTECT
AND HOLD...

Thouros' original human inhabitants arrived via ark, those cyclopean ships blindly dispatched by Old Earth, programmed to land on the first inhabitable planet and disgorge their human cargo. As elsewhere, however, any further detail or specificity is lost to us.

GO FORTH!

THOUGH
BIRTHED FROM
THE SEA, YOUR
DOMINION IS MY
CREATION
ENTIRE...

...THOUGH
YOU AND IT
REMAIN MINE
TO RECLAIM.

Whether the result of underlying tensions, the sense of adventure fostered by an alien world, or--in Thouros' case--a planet matching its inhabitants in belligerent hostility, the end result was the same: Societal regression and reformation on a massive scale.

Thus, we are bereft of accurate and objective histories and must excavate truth from myths, legends and oral folklore with origins long after settlers had abandoned written records and coalesced into startlingly distinct cultural and ethnic groups.

Fortunately, the Alliance's tradition of robust Dispersion research provides the means to deduce significant information regarding the human diaspora, including a unique quirk of history that continued to define Thouros even after contact with the Alliance.

...YOURS
TO RULE UNTIL
IT IS RETURNED
TO ME.

Harnessing a mélange of disciplines inclusive of archaeological excavations, cultural analysis, and broad genetic testing, Alliance researchers painstakingly traced Thourian humanity's origins to not one but two distinct sites upon the planet's surface.

The implication--multiple arks landing upon a single planet--while exceedingly rare, is neither impossible nor unprecedented. What renders Thouros unique is the relative isolation of the diasporic groups, resulting in the codification of two discrete ethne.

The first settlers to arrive on Thouros landed in the south, upon the fertile but volcanically scarred continent Urlo, where archaeological findings attest to robust agricultural development and a subsequent splintering into competitive warrior aristocracies.

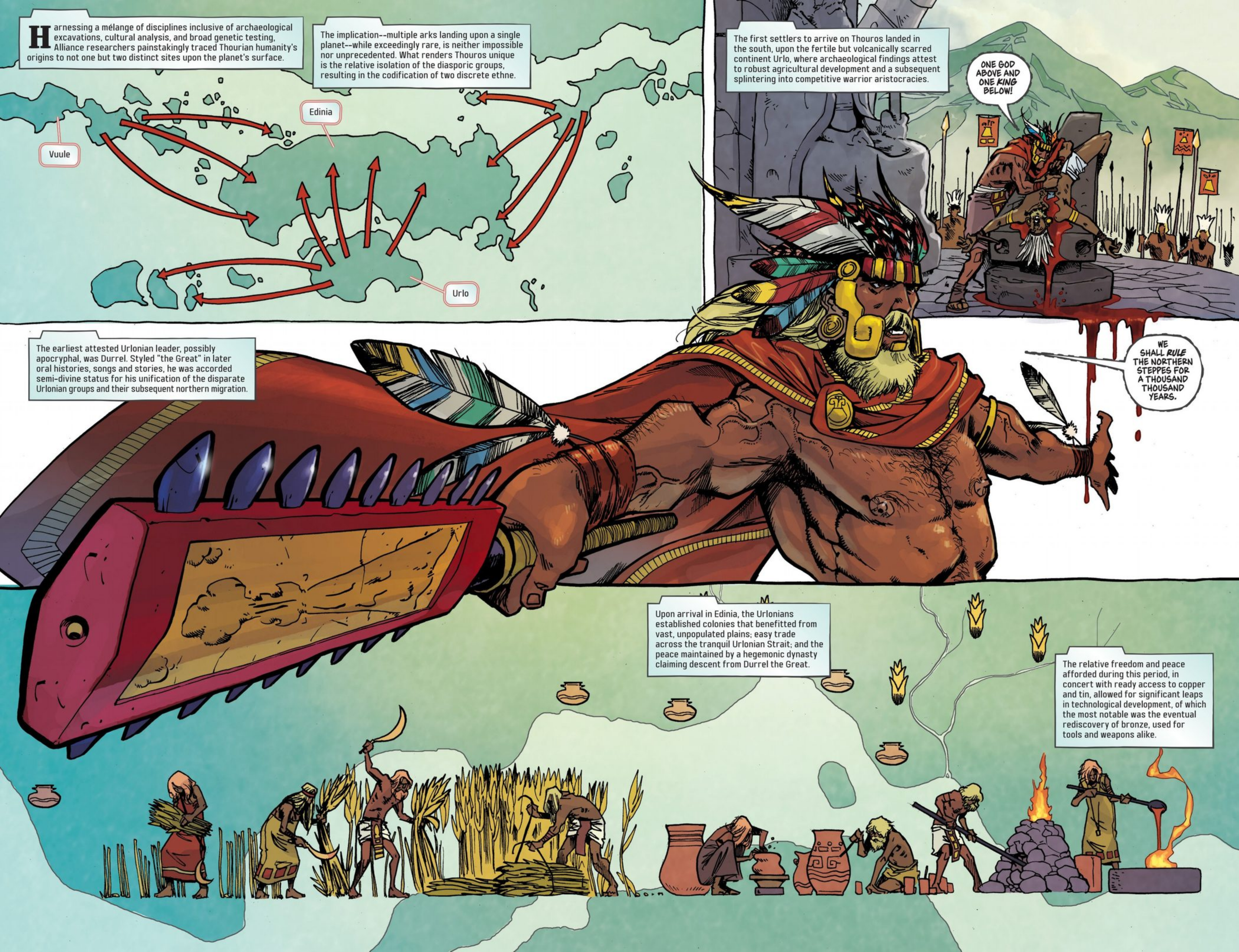
ONE GOD
ABOVE AND
ONE KING
BELOW!

WE
SHALL RULE
THE NORTHERN
STEPPES FOR
A THOUSAND
THOUSAND
YEARS.

The earliest attested Urlonian leader, possibly apocryphal, was Durrel. Styled "the Great" in later oral histories, songs and stories, he was accorded semi-divine status for his unification of the disparate Urlonian groups and their subsequent northern migration.

Upon arrival in Edinia, the Urlonians established colonies that benefitted from vast, unpopulated plains; easy trade across the tranquil Urlonian Strait; and the peace maintained by a hegemonic dynasty claiming descent from Durrel the Great.

The relative freedom and peace afforded during this period, in concert with ready access to copper and tin, allowed for significant leaps in technological development, of which the most notable was the eventual rediscovery of bronze, used for tools and weapons alike.





The name Hrinden the Conqueror appears frequently in the Urlonian tradition, portrayed as a savage barbarian ruler. However, these appearances span such great distances and eras as to render it impossible for them to reference a single figure.

This disconnect is the result of simple linguistic confusion: Hrinden was not a proper name but a title, roughly equating to "captain," which, in the context of the sea-faring Hrind and their unique societal structure, takes on a broader and more profound meaning.

SHIVER AND SUFFER NO MORE. THE SOUTHERN LANDS ARE OURS FOR THE TAKING.

BEAT THE LEVIATHAN'S ROAR OR YOUR CHILDREN'S HUNGRY CRIES!

Touching down in Vuule's frigid wastes, millennia after the arrival of the Urlonians, the Hrind were forced to pull their sustenance from the northern seas, a harsh, unforgiving existence.

With improvements to their ships, the Hrind established their own colonies along Edinia's western, northern and eastern coasts. Mirroring the organization of fishing crews, these villages were largely autonomous and ruled absolutely by individual Hrinden.

Predictably, Edinia became the site of numerous violent clashes. The more robust Urlonian record attributes their origins solely to Hrind razzias but, given the pervasiveness of Urlonian warrior culture, the more likely cause is bilateral resource competition.

Bronze breastplate

Flint spear

Bronze helmet

Bronze sword

Leather-bound shield

Wood and bronze club

Flint sword

Leather armor

After accounting for surprise eruptions and numerical asymmetries, Hrind/Urlonian conflicts during this period were typically determined by Urlonian technological superiority. Hrind decentralization, however, rendered them exceedingly difficult to fully vanquish.

The Hrind's initial forays into the Edinian interior were in pursuit of migratory ungulates. By the time they had been hunted to extinction, the Hrind had adopted large-scale Urlonian agricultural practices.

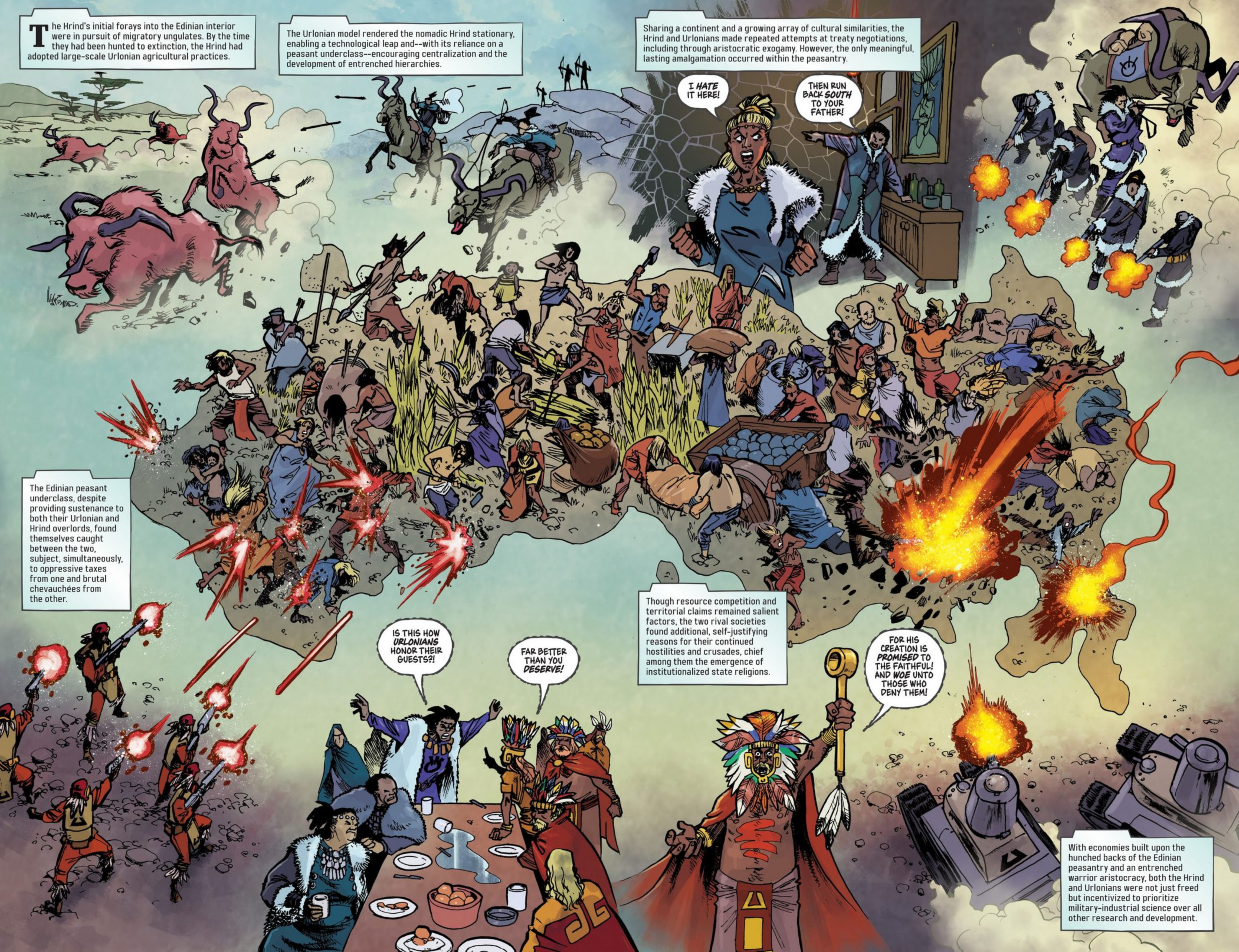
The Urlonian model rendered the nomadic Hrind stationary, enabling a technological leap and—with its reliance on a peasant underclass—encouraging centralization and the development of entrenched hierarchies.

Sharing a continent and a growing array of cultural similarities, the Hrind and Urlonians made repeated attempts at treaty negotiations, including through aristocratic exogamy. However, the only meaningful, lasting amalgamation occurred within the peasantry.

The Edinian peasant underclass, despite providing sustenance to both their Urlonian and Hrind overlords, found themselves caught between the two, subject, simultaneously, to oppressive taxes from one and brutal chevauchées from the other.

Though resource competition and territorial claims remained salient factors, the two rival societies found additional, self-justifying reasons for their continued hostilities and crusades, chief among them the emergence of institutionalized state religions.

With economies built upon the hunched backs of the Edinian peasantry and an entrenched warrior aristocracy, both the Hrind and Urlonians were not just freed but incentivized to prioritize military-industrial science over all other research and development.



I HATE IT HERE!

THEN RUN BACK SOUTH TO YOUR FATHER!

IS THIS HOW URLONIANS HONOR THEIR GUESTS?!

FAR BETTER THAN YOU DESERVE!

FOR HIS CREATION IS PROMISED TO THE FAITHFUL! AND WOE UNTO THOSE WHO DENY THEM!

The Thourian prioritization of military research, further spurred on by the Hrind-Urionian arms race, resulted in an efflorescence of technological advancement, far outstripping development rates on planets of comparable size, climate, and resources.

Though it had always been a hostile home for humanity--subject to frequent monsoons, wildfires, earthquakes, and hurricanes--the natural disasters facing Thouros intensified dramatically alongside its ongoing ecological collapse and atmospheric degradation.

However, this precipitous advancement was almost entirely limited to technologies with military applications, with few resources committed to issues of human health and welfare, even as generations of constant war scarred the planet irrevocably.

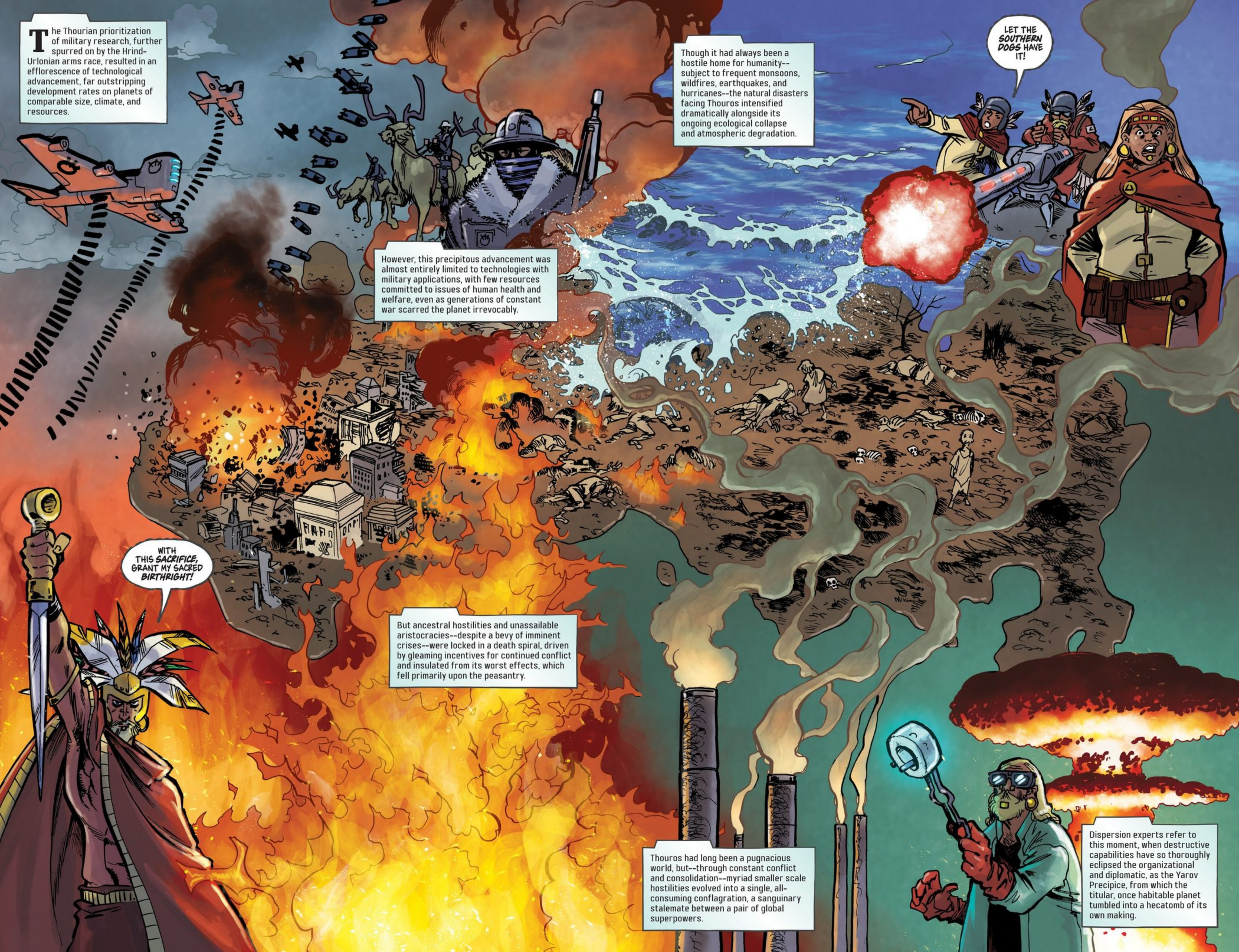
WITH THIS SACRIFICE, GRANT MY SACRED BIRTHRIGHT!

But ancestral hostilities and unassailable aristocracies--despite a bevy of imminent crises--were locked in a death spiral, driven by gleaming incentives for continued conflict and insulated from its worst effects, which fell primarily upon the peasantry.

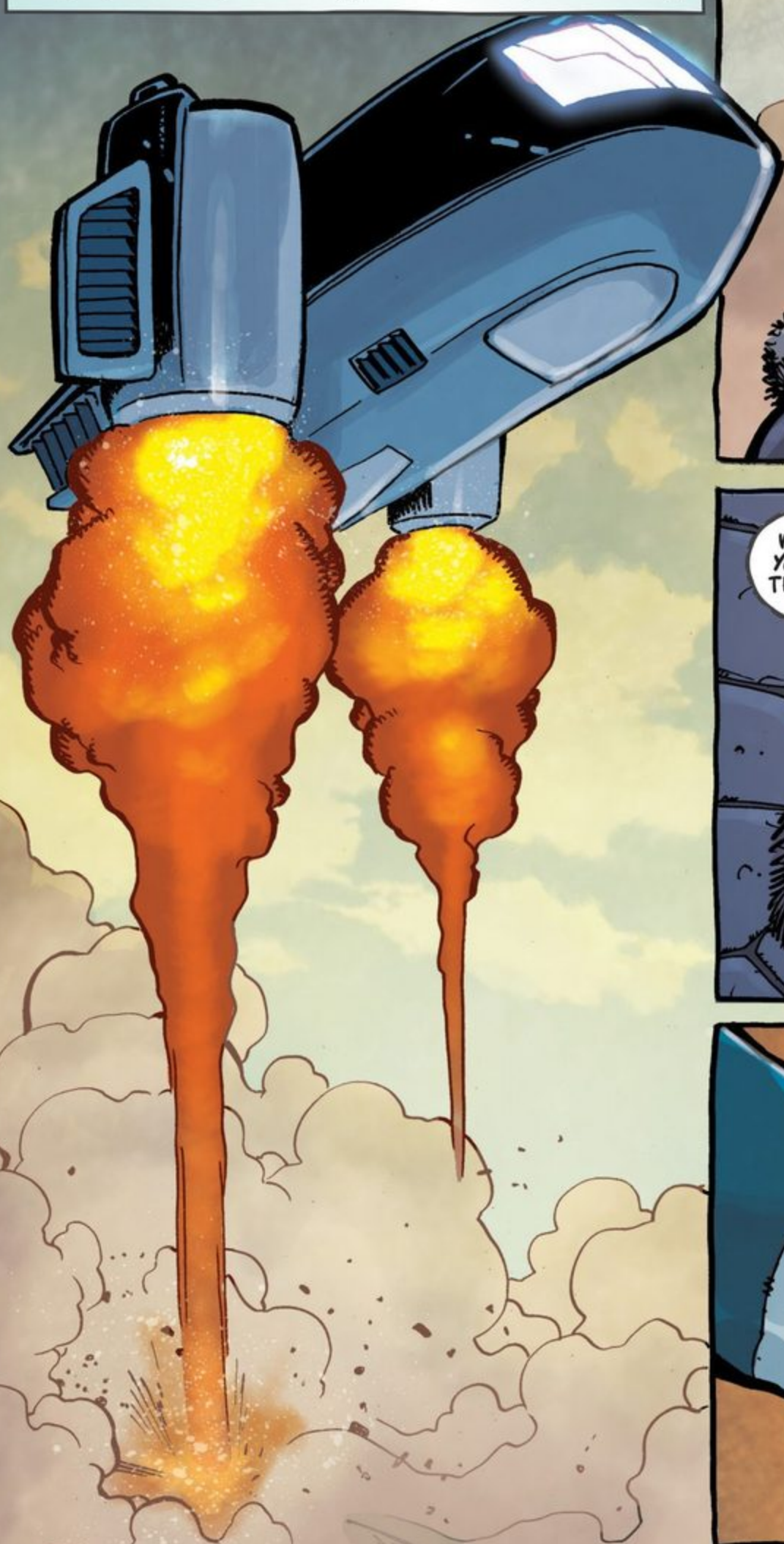
Thouros had long been a pugnacious world, but--through constant conflict and consolidation--myriad smaller scale hostilities evolved into a single, all-consuming conflagration, a sanguinary stalemate between a pair of global superpowers.

LET THE SOUTHERN DOGS HAVE IT!

Dispersion experts refer to this moment, when destructive capabilities have so thoroughly eclipsed the organizational and diplomatic, as the Yarov Precipice, from which the titular, once habitable planet tumbled into a hecatomb of its own making.

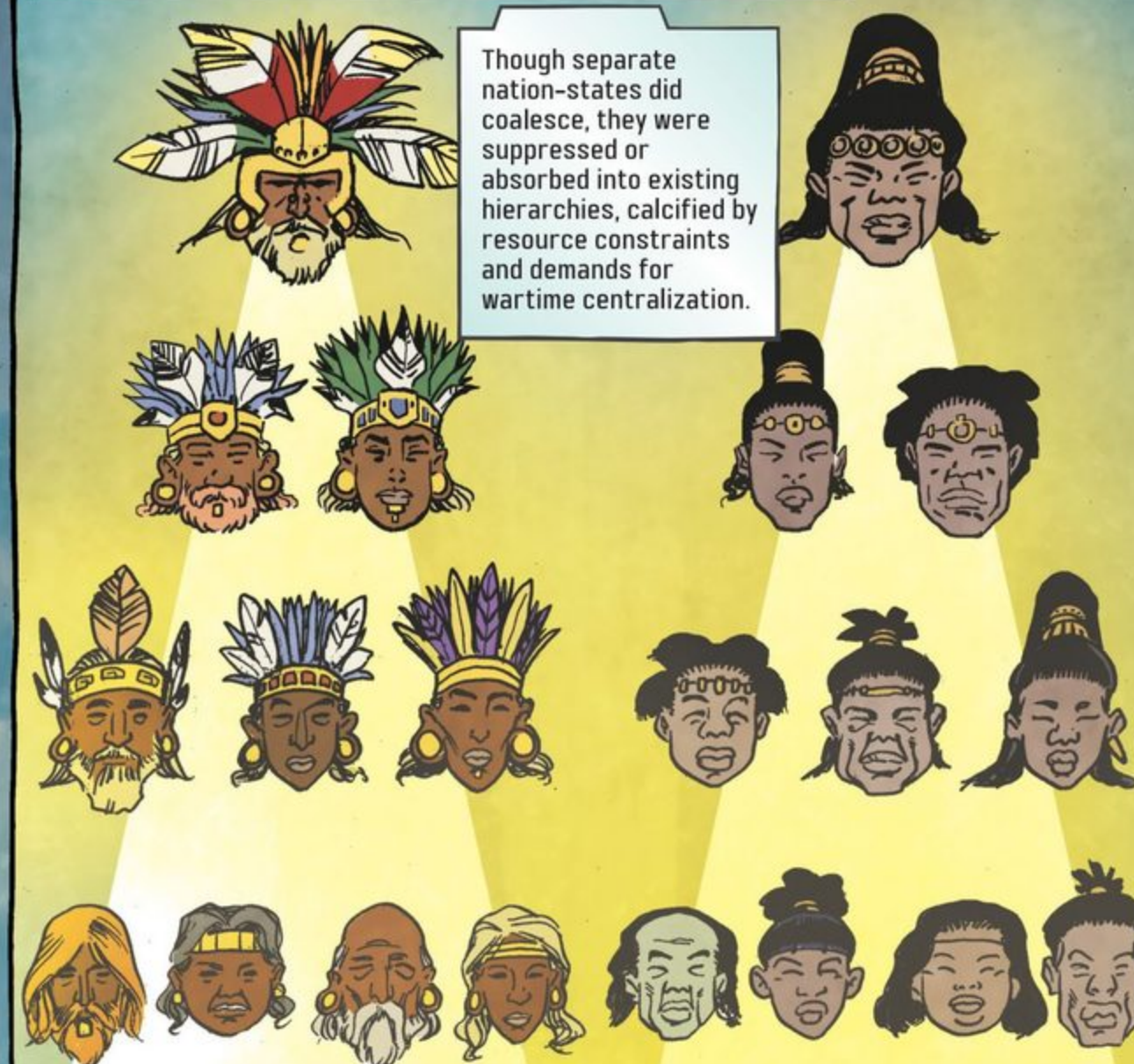


It was at this pivotal moment, with the Hrind barreling toward the very knowledge--forbidden by the Teomekhean demiurge--that had doomed Yarov, that the Alliance made contact with a war party small enough to be easily pacified, should it prove necessary.



This came only after an extended period observing Thouro's and its politics from orbit; though standard operating procedures by the time of Thouro's rediscovery, these lessons had been hard-learned from disastrous early overtures to the Human Diaspora.

While titles, municipal organization and other specifics varied, by the time of the Alliance's arrival, the organizational structures of the Urlonians and Hrind--despite viewing their societies as incompatible--had undergone a process of convergent coevolution.



Though separate nation-states did coalesce, they were suppressed or absorbed into existing hierarchies, calcified by resource constraints and demands for wartime centralization.

The Rediscovery Protocols--in addition to providing practiced scripts, strategies, and codes of behavior--stipulated that contact parties include a variety of dignitaries in order to maximize any opportunity to ingratiate the Alliance to the subject population.

THE INTERPLANETARY ALLIANCE COMES IN PEACE.

WE OFFER YOU FREEDOM FROM WAR AND DEPRIVATION.



In exchange for abandoning their pursuit of knowledge proscribed by the Church, the Hrind were granted the Alliance's most reliable diplomatic tool, Kirkardi Engines, calibrated to provide abundant energy from readily available but untapped Thourian resources.



Overnight, Hrind society was transformed, with the Kirkardi Engines facilitating technological advancement across sectors. However, the most significant developments remained military oriented.

In exchange for this incredible boon, the Hrind provided the Alliance with access to their desolate mountain ranges and the labor pool required to excavate the rare earth elements essential to Alliance technology.



MORE?! YOU WILL ACCEPT WHAT I GIVE YOU.

YOU BREATHE ON THOUROS BY MY PRIVILEGE.

Predictably, the Alliance's first Thourian accord soon disintegrated. But while the bellicose Hrind expelled most Alliance representatives, the Teomekhean Church was granted special dispensation on account of the Kirkardi Engine's vast, transformative benefits.



The Alliance's second Thourian accord came even easier; the Alliance provided the Urlonians with Kirkardi Engines as well as advanced military technology even as it continued supporting the Hrind war machine through trade and Teomekhean expertise.



Operating from a practiced playbook, the Alliance's involvement did little to disrupt existing Thourian hierarchies aside from one notable exception: The formation of a new class of compradors who facilitated the transfer of Thourian wealth to Alliance coffers.

KEEP MOVING! QUOTAS WON'T FILL THEMSELVES!

Despite formally backing the Urlonians, the Alliance provided dual-track support--through trade and the outsourcing of numerous Thourian sectors to its own expansive corporate entities--thereby enabling both belligerents to sustain their focus on military affairs.

Though the ensuing conflict was protracted and kinetically intense, it was a war of domination, not extermination, as continued Alliance backing was contingent upon compliance with Teomekhean moral doctrine and the Guiding Principles on Dispersion Populations.



...AND MAY THE CREATOR TAKE ME SHOULD I FAIL IN THIS DUTY.

LONG LIVE THE KING.



OUR LONG, VIOLENT STRUGGLE IS FINALLY AT AN END.

I GIVE YOU PEACE AND THE FREEDOM THAT COMES WITH IT!



As a result, the carnage of the Urlonian Crusade and the positional warfare that dominated it stood in stark contrast to the subsequent occupation; rather than razing Hrind settlements to the ground, the Urlonians incorporated them into their maturing state.

This consolidation was expedited by the Alliance's global footprint, such that the first ruler of a unified Thouros assumed nominal control over a complex network of entities administering everything from infrastructure and logistics to municipal security forces.

RECENT INVESTMENT FROM ENDURIAN METALS HAS DRAMATICALLY INCREASED OUR PRODUCTION CAPACITY.

Within a generation, Thouros was unrecognizable; the war-ravaged world that had greeted the Alliance upon its arrival had become a peaceful hub of industrial and infrastructural development, with living standards quickly rising to meet Alliance norms.

Certain inalienable rights--in accordance with Alliance and Teomekhean precepts--were also instituted, ensuring that Thourian citizens, regardless of ethnicity or background, enjoyed a minimum level of protection and freedoms.

IN CONSIDERATION OF ESTABLISHED PRECEDENT...
...THIS COURT FINDS YOU NOT GUILTY.

AUGUST'S
CYBERNETICS

This investment was focused on establishing Thouros not only as a center for mineral refinement and industrial output, but as a vital node in the complex and sprawling interstellar transport network maintained by the Alliance in the pre-orchaleum era.

While wealth continued to travel upward--to the comprador class and, inevitably, Alliance corporate entities--even Thouros' manual laborers and service workers benefitted significantly from Alliance technology, resources and, most of all, peace.

Following a provisional period-- during which time Thourian infrastructure, bureaucracy and governance were brought in line with established benchmarks-- Thouros was formally admitted as an Alliance member in good standing, with full privileges.

While its entitlements paled in comparison to those conferred upon charter worlds, Thouros benefited from preferential trade arrangements, defense assurances and access to the proprietary technology of both Alliance corporations and the Teomekhean Church.

MY CHILD:
EMBRACE YOUR
ROLE IN THE GRAND
MACHINE AND
REPEAT AFTER
ME...

I--SAY YOUR
NAME--PLEDGE
ALLEGIANCE TO THE
INTERPLANETARY
DEVELOPMENT
ALLIANCE.

Thouros' Alliance membership was contingent on the surrender of prior autonomy, compliance with Alliance tax regimes, and force contributions to the ongoing campaign against the Orouran Empire.

These concessions were easy to make in light of dramatic economic benefits and conscription policies targeting the working classes, inheritors of a millennia-long legacy of conflict and strife who came to be regarded as the Alliance's most reliable combatants.

End

THE FIGHTING THOURIANS: VALIANT ACTS AND VIOLENT ENDS

BY DR. ALDOUS FOYROUSHI

Over the course of its own universal expansion, Alliance strategy came to revolve around discovering outlets for member planets' existing cultural or (in the case of significant mutations) biological drives. Though Thouros was home to three disparate cultures – two distinct and one syncretic – they had all been shaped by millennia of warfare, such that a release valve became necessary for the planet's culturally bellicose population. The Alliance military was all too eager to provide one.

Thourians flowed steadily into all branches of the Alliance armed services. For the wealthy ruling and comprador classes – largely consisting of ethnic Urlonians and Hrind – this entailed sending their progeny to off-planet service academies. As ever, higher education comprised a particularly insidious manner of upward and interplanetary wealth transfer, with parents shouldering extensive transportation and tuition fees in order to purchase for their children officer commissions. By contrast, the lower classes, in which the syncretic Edinians were overrepresented, were readily absorbed into the infantry.

The Fighting Thourians were shock troops, deployed to quickly and efficiently batter obstinate populations – whether indigenous or Alliance born – into compliance. Most often, they were tasked with taming the Alliance hinterlands, grappling with populations that had proven themselves unsusceptible to the standard methodology prescribed in the Rediscovery Protocols. The Alliance actively spread tales of their ferocity and dedication throughout the universe, such that, when they arrived upon 'Aides, it was widely viewed as the de facto end of the planet's revolt.

In the earliest days of what would become the Lutheran Revolution, the Alliance believed the unrest to comprise little more than largely uncoordinated labor actions and an increase in already prevalent indigenous insurgency. The latter was a particular concern, with the Surroko's incessant raids on Alliance cities, orchaleum facilities, and military installations negatively impacting military objectives as well as the broader economy through the disruption of orchaleum supply. Further complicating matters was the Surroko tradition of wartime



The Alliance's 23rd Infantry Division arrived upon 'Aides in the Revolution's earliest days, confident that the diffuse rebellion would be quickly pacified.

retreats to the mountains, negating the potential for meaningful air or calvary support. Far from intractable, the Alliance viewed this as a problem tailor made for the Fighting Thourians.

Though the 23rd Infantry landed upon then-'Aides with its characteristic, honor-driven enthusiasm and bombast, it quickly waned. Rather than the heroic blitzes and easy victories to which they were accustomed, the Fighting Thourians were faced with a grueling, circuitous march through an unfamiliar and mountainous landscape that was controlled and known intimately by their highly mobile quarry. Alliance Army Command received transmissions describing nigh-inaccessible passes, frequent backtracking, and murderous midnight raids carried out by caprin riders who disappeared back into 'Aides' craggy mountains, leaving carnage in their wake.

Interestingly, though their rations were heavily restricted – owing to their tortuous supply lines, dismounted to traverse the mountainous terrain – the Fighting Thourians suffered no similar dearth of ammunition, as Surroko guerrilla tactics rarely offered an opportunity for retaliation. Urged forward by Command, the Fighting Thourians, despite their empty bellies, marched ever deeper into the forbidding mountains in which the Surroko had made their home for untold generations, eager for the glory that would be made all the greater for their trials and tribulations.

The final transmission of the 23rd Infantry was a harrowing one. It spoke of ravenous hunger, a division wracked by desertions and attrition warfare, withering under a constant guerrilla assault, with their tenuous supply lines finally, irrevocably severed, an act for which inaugural Freedom Guard member Victor MacLiu later publicly claimed credit.

For months, Army officers harbored suspicions and theories regarding the ultimate fate of the famed 23rd Infantry, much of them based on a dramatic surge in reports of Surroko wielding Alliance munitions. The mystery of the Fighting Thourians was later solved, definitively, with the discovery of gruesome warnings installed at passes into Surroko-controlled territory. Within a matter of years, the 23rd Infantry had fully replenished its ranks. But though Thouros' teeming Edinian population once again made the division a fierce and effective one, it never regained the reputation and renown enjoyed by the Fighting Thourians.



The wholesale disappearance of the renowned Fighting Thourians and the grisly reveal of their fate had an outsized impact on Alliance morale.

SUBMIT QUESTIONS
regarding Lutheran history to
DrAldousFoyroushi@AtlantisStillSunk.com

QUESTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

WITH DR. ALDOUS FOYROUSHI

After a one-month sabbatical, we are refreshed, invigorated, and thrilled to welcome you back to **Free Planet**, especially as this issue, drawn magnificently by guest artist **Ilias Kyriazis**, commences our first-ever interlude: **Expansion Protocols**. As of this moment, you have already explored the means by which one of the human diaspora's dominant civilizations – the Interplanetary Development Alliance – spread throughout and exerted its control over the universe and next month you will witness an entirely different approach.

Additional details are forthcoming but first, and without further ado, your questions...

Dr. Foyroushi,

We've spent a lot of time learning about the macroeconomic policies of Lutheria. From the orchaleum mines they nationalized and protected to the embargoes placed on them, we know about the Lutheran economy. What about their more everyday economic concerns? What is their currency like and how is it distributed (wages, welfare, stock funds, etc.)? Are there jobs for all or some sort of universal income? Please, despite what some critics might say, I do want to know the tax policy of the planet!

Ever learning,

Stephen Adkison

Thank you, Stephen, for this detailed, thoughtful query. I am, truly, overjoyed to learn that readers like yourself are engaging with the *Free Planet* project on such a deep level as to desire information and specifics regarding the more quotidian and microeconomic aspects of life on post-Revolution Lutheria. Regrettably, with our focus on broader, planetary-level concerns, much of this information has been given short shrift, so I am appreciative of the opportunity to address our omission.

Like all Interplanetary Development Alliance members outside of the charter worlds, Lutheria, then-'Aides, possessed its own distinct currency, the drachma, which was pegged to the Alliance dollar with a managed band. From the earliest days of the Revolution, the use of an Alliance-based currency proved an issue most contentious.

But while there existed many vocal proponents of abandoning the drachma or even abandoning currency altogether in favor of solutions such as informal or centrally planned barter systems, the lack of existing infrastructure rendered these initiatives

infeasible. Thus, the drachma was maintained – over strident objections – as a fiat currency.

However, once unpegged from the Alliance dollar, the drachma was unable to weather the rampant stagflation catalyzed by drastic shortages of all imported goods and the decimation of the orchaleum extraction sector, the planet's only major industry. Central economic planning was instituted to mitigate the worst economic shocks, with the most notable example being the Lutheran agricultural initiative of 524, which caused its own difficulties, as seen in *Free Planet* #1.

The drachma's difficulties only increased with the outbreak of the trade war with the Alliance and eventual embargo. With unemployment and inflation both rampant, the Lutheran government established price controls on essential goods including food, medicine, and clothing, but as the value of the drachma continued to depreciate sharply, Lutherians – especially those outside major cities – began to utilize informal barter and gift economies, often revolving around the MacLiu clan system, alongside a growing and thriving black market.

Dr. Foyroushi,

What is the Freedom Guard's role to the population of Lutheria as a symbol and idea? Thank you Dr. Foyroushi, always a pleasure to hear your responses!

Sincerely,

Mario Botte

An installment of Questions and Clarifications would feel incomplete, deficient in some way, if not for a contribution from our most diligent querent. Which is to say: Welcome back, Mario. As ever, we welcome your insightful input and contributions to the *Free Planet* project.

Put simply, the Freedom Guard was intended, from its inception, to function as exemplars of revolutionary service. Pulled from the numerous and diverse factions that comprised the Revolutionary Coalition, Oliver Gracchon's hope was that the team would inspire Lutheran citizens to ever greater acts of sacrifice and triumph, thereby safeguarding the dream of a completely free planet.

As an unintended consequence, however, the Freedom Guard members also began to be viewed as celebrities, undercutting the spirit of egalitarianism meant to pervade Lutheran life and institutions. The most revered and celebrated

members were those who played visible roles in the Revolution itself, such as Gloria Sunandez, Victor MacLiu, Keen Surroko, and, most of all, Marcus Kingvarti. While the Lutheran population's view remained aspirational, it shifted subtly, from wanting to emulate the Freedom Guard members to wanting to *become* the Freedom Guard members. This manifested itself in a flood of applications, not only to join the Freedom Guard, but to assist it as maintenance, engineering and other support staff. This sharp uptick in interest was no doubt urged on by the guaranteed rations received by the Freedom Guard even amid growing food shortages.

This glowing view of the Freedom Guard was far from universal, however. Beginning with the armistice, elements existed up and down the political spectrum that took issue with the actions of the Lutheran government and the Freedom Guard, far more public-facing than the constantly shifting Council membership, increasingly received the brunt of these elements' ire. This situation only intensified with the Freedom Guard's involvement in planet-side conflicts, especially separatist movements and landowner revolts such as that seen in *Free Planet #4*.

While the Freedom Guard remained widely appreciated for its protection of Lutheria from the Orouran Empire, there existed a mounting backlash regarding the group's status as a privileged class. This backlash only grew more fervent and acute as regular Lutheran citizens struggled in the economic context described in the preceding response.

Reader enthusiasm for the *Free Planet* project continues to express itself in remarkable ways, through insightful questions such as the preceding as well as incredible bespoke artwork. It is an unmitigated joy to see Jed Dougherty's renderings of important Lutheran figures filtered through the distinct aesthetics of our most artistically gifted readers.

This submission comes from **Alec Bezzina**, who has presented Victor MacLiu, Katja Usmansen, Keen Surroko, Talun, and Hora Ha'Neel in his unmistakable, muscular and vibrant style. For more from Alec, visit him on Instagram at [@alec_bezzina](https://www.instagram.com/alec_bezzina). And, if you have depictions of the *Free Planet* cast to share, please do not hesitate to email them to me at DrAldousFoyroushi@AtlantisStillSunk.com

Having learned more about the mechanisms behind the Alliance's galactic expansion, you are now fully prepared to hear about the Orouran Empire's approach to the same. This will constitute the contents of *Free Planet #8*, the second and final installment of **Expansion Protocols**. Joining us for this issue will be another guest artist, the incredible **Tyrell Cannon**, best known for his work on *The Schlub* and, with **Aubrey Sitterson**, *BEEF BROS*.

In *Free Planet #8*, you will thrill to Tyrell's depiction of the Orouran Apostle Niketas and his violent, implacable march across the savage planet Laloux. In doing so, you will learn not only of the Orouran approach to expansion but Orouran philosophy, religion, and logic, thereby providing a deeper and fuller understanding of the broader universe of *Free Planet*.

This new understanding and added context will then be rewarded in *Free Planet #9*, with the return of **Jed Dougherty** for a six-issue arc picking up exactly where *Free Planet #6* left off. If you find yourself in need of a refresher, consider picking up a copy of *Free Planet* Volume 1, available at your local comic shop right this very moment. While this volume collects *Free Planet* #1-6, including backmatter, these letters pages and issues #7-8 will not be included in the trade paperbacks, so make sure not to let your subscription lapse.

This brings us to the conclusion of yet another installment of Questions and Clarifications. However, I remain at your eager service vis-à-vis any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Aldous Foyroushi

SUBMIT QUESTIONS

regarding Lutheran history to
DrAldousFoyroushi@AtlantisStillSunk.com



NEXT ISSUE

Cover A



SITTERSON
CANNON
ASTONE
ESPOSITO

EXPANSION
PROTOCOLS
PART 2 OF 2

FREE PLANET



*"There is freedom in purpose,
in obedience."*

Cover B

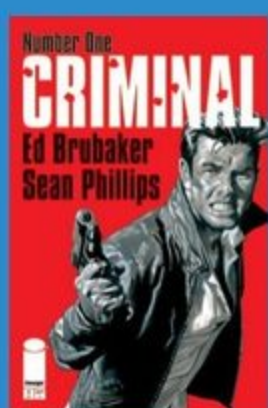
DECEMBER AT IMAGE



It's the season for giving. Hence, it's also the season for buying comics which are similarly seasonal. ***Startling Tales Of Santa #1*** is Benito Cereno [*Hector Plasm, Blood & Thunder*] and his artist chums finding six ways to show how WEIRD St. Nick stuff is. There's a mixture of humanity and folklore so berserk that I'm not sure whether Benito is making it up or not. Plus Santa kicking Lovecraftian ass. The star has to be the boy who poops seasonal treats when he's beaten with sticks. Wow.



Dread the Halls 2025 #1 takes a similar large-anthology approach to *Startling Tales*, but digs in a different direction from the Santa-focus. Specifically, towards the graveyard, and when it's there, it keeps on digging until it has enough corpses for its evil purposes. Chris Ryall [*Onyx*] and Jordan Hart [*The Cabinet*] write four stories with distinctly different vibes. Seeing Luana Vecchio [*Lovesick*] illustrate a Hallmark-movie take on *Midsommar* was a special Christmas treat.



This may not be Christmas-y, but it sure is special. ***Giant Size Criminal #1*** is a surprise direction for Sean and Ed, where Tracy Lawless panics when a skyscraper-sized pickpocket moves into the city. No, of course not. This is *Criminal*, one of the best comics of the last 20 years, and if you've been intrigued by the forthcoming Amazon series, this is designed to be your entry point to the original. I love it so much I even designed a small RPG for it. I don't even know if I'm being paid.



But it's not just larger-than-usual specials this month – we have a similarly hefty 40 pages of ***Inferno Girl Red: Book Two***, which continues to expand the Massive-Verse with Mat Groom [*Spider-Verse vs Venomverse*] and Erica D'Urso [*Immortal Legend Batman*] serving up looks and magical-superhero teen energy. It's my first time with Inferno Girl, and I could feel the Buffy-goes-high-tech-Henshin energy seething off it and the power of Friends To Lovers or Maybe The Other Way Around is strong.



Finally, ***Wrestle Heist*** has Kyle Starks [*Peacemaker Tries Hard, Sexcastle, I Hate This Place*] returning to writing and drawing, which is just a delight. I'm not a wrestling person (except for being told I look a bit like Claudio Castagnoli, presumably after a wasting disease) but I have a real weakness for all things ring-drama. And in this case, crime-drama, too, as a nice-guy-playing-heel decides he's had enough and is going home with the big prize. Not Christmas-y at all, but a gift.

Kieron Gillen writes ***The Power Fantasy*** and ***DIE: Loaded***.

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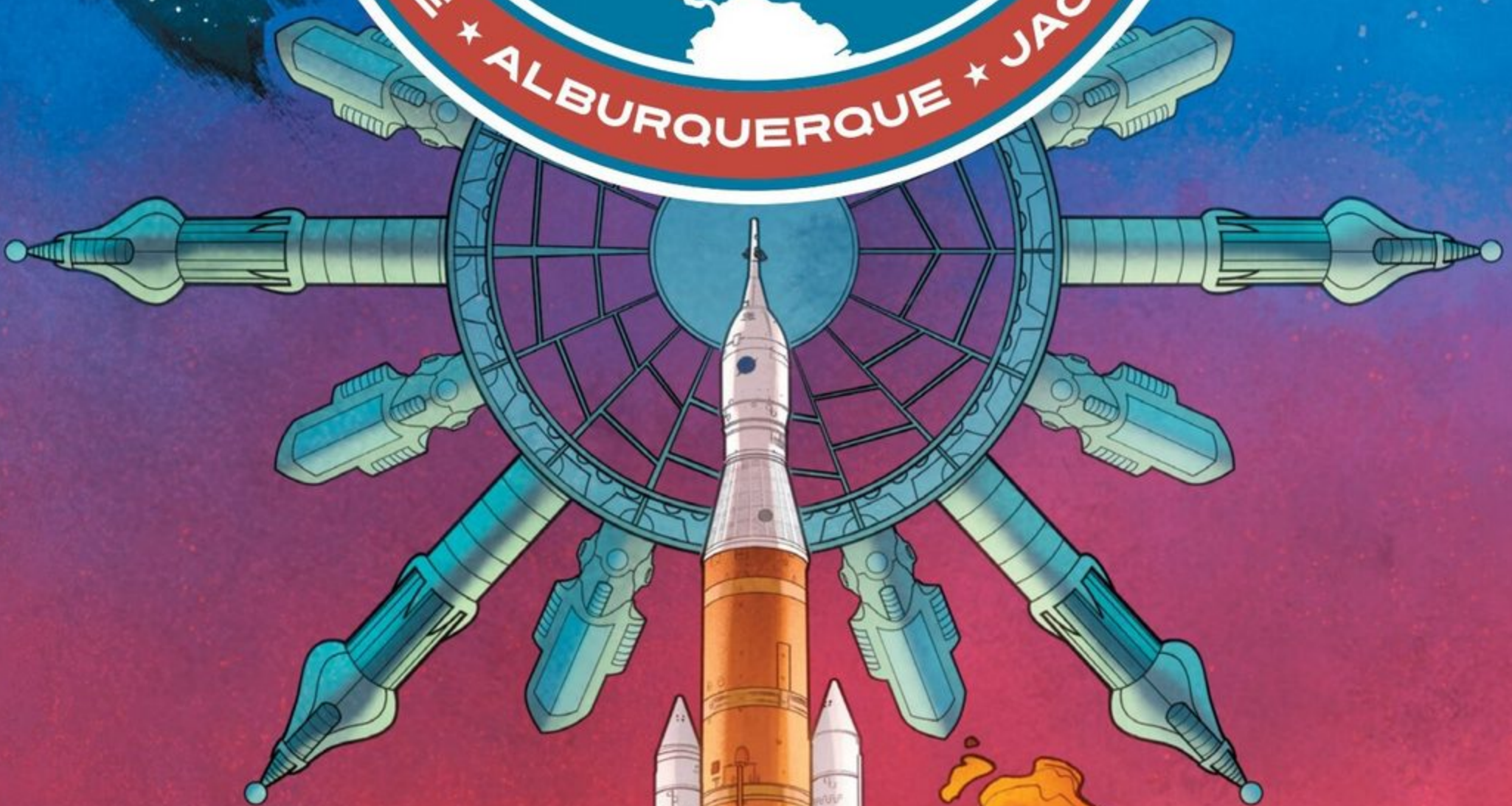


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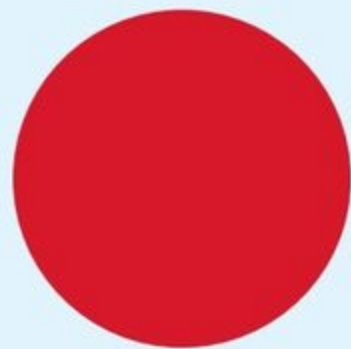
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